

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
For the Montana National Register of Historic Places Program and State Antiquities Database

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
Montana Historical Society
PO Box 201202, 1410 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **2201 Saint Johns Avenue**

Historic Address (if applicable): **24th Street & St. Johns Ave.**

City/Town: **Billings**

Site Number: **24 YL 1865**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Yellowstone**

Historic Name: **District No. 2 Senior High School**

Original Owner(s): **Billings Public Schools**

Current Ownership ☐ Private ☒ Public

Current Property Name: **West High School**

Owner(s): **Billings Public Schools**

Owner Address: **415 N. 30th Street
Billings, MT**

Phone:

Legal Location

Geocode: 03-0927-06-3-04-01-0000

PM: **Montana** Township: **1S** Range: **26E**

NE ¼ SW ¼ SW ¼ of Section: **6**

Lot(s): **Unknown**

Block(s): **Unknown**

Addition: **Unknown** Year of Addition:

USGS Quad Name: **Billings West** Year: **1957 updated to 1975**

Historic Use: **Academic building**

Current Use: **Academic building**

Construction Date: **1958** ☐ Estimated ☒ Actual

Theater addition 1965; auxiliary gym 1975

☒ Original Location ☐ Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov/topofinder2

☐ NAD 27 ☒ NAD 83 (preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **688820** Northing: **5071632**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Date of this document: **April 17, 2010**

Form Prepared by: **Diana J. Painter, PhD**

Address: **3518 N. C Street, Spokane, WA 99205**

Daytime Phone: **(707) 364-0697**

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP: ☒ yes ☐ no

Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Date: 11/16/2010

Evaluator: John Boughton

Comments:

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Property Name: **West High School**

Site Number: **24 YL 1865**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

☒ See Additional Information Page

Architectural Style: **Modern** If Other, specify: **Curtain wall (main building); New Formalism (theater)**

Property Type: **Educational building** Specific Property Type: **High School**

Architect: **Unknown** Architectural Firm/City/State: **Nordquist & Sundell & Drake & Gustafson, Billings, MT**

Builder/Contractor: **Hitz Construction Co.** Company/City/State: **Billings, MT**

Source of Information: **Newspaper**

Location and setting. The West High School in Billings is a one-and-two-story building with an irregular footprint and flat roof. It is located on a rectangular lot bounded by St. Johns Avenue on the south, 21st Street West on the east, and 24th Street West on the west. It is south of Miles Avenue. The building complex is in the eastern portion of its lot and faces south onto St. Johns Avenue. West of the building complex is a wedge-shaped parking area that fronts on St. Johns Avenue. On the far west side is a track. In the northeast corner is a smaller parking lot. Just south of this parking area are six tennis courts. Most of the rest of the site is in lawn. A large monument sign is located near St. Johns Avenue toward the center of the lot, in front of the main entry. The areas to the northwest, north, east and southeast of the site are largely residential. Areas to the west and southwest are commercial.

Materials. The materials seen in the structure of West High School include concrete, concrete masonry units, and steel frame. Cladding materials include variegated brick veneer in a running bond pattern in shades of yellow, orange, terra cotta and white; aggregate, on the face of the theater; and corrugated metal on the twelve-sided gymnasium and a newer building not evaluated here. Additional materials include aluminum and anodized-aluminum-frame doors and windows and glass block. Most of the complex is reinforced concrete with a concrete foundation and built-up roof with a gravel finish.

Massing and design. West High School has a complex form. In general, the classrooms are two-stories in height arranged around an interior courtyard. Two wings, a long and short wing, extend east from the courtyard. The twelve-sided gymnasium, which dates from 1958, is located on the west side of the complex near the center of the lot. A contemporary building complex is located in the northwest corner of the complex. It has an elongated footprint oriented north-south. In the southwest corner is a theater, which has a tall cubic form with the exception of the stage area, which has a taller form. This building has a rectangular footprint. The main entry to the school is small and is located at the apex of the "L" formed by the theater and the longest classroom wing.

The main building

The south façade, beginning at the entry, consists of a double entry door with small lights, a sidelight, and transom windows. This is recessed below an aggregate panel. The two-story wing to the right or east has ten bays in the first portion and eight bays in the addition. Each bay is separated by a vertical concrete panel that is perpendicular to and projects from the face of the building, but does not reach the edge of the deep eaves. The panels are incised in a decorative square-within-a-square pattern. Each bay in the westerly portion of this wing has a row of six three-part windows at the upper and lower levels. Each individual window has a large, central, fixed light, a small fixed light above, and a small operable light below. Plain spandrel panels are located between the upper and lower windows and below the sills of the lower windows.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

A recessed entry between slightly offset facades is located where this wing transitions to the easterly wing. The eight bays here are also separated by the vertical concrete panels. Windows consist of a window wall of 25 horizontally-oriented lights that extend from panel to panel, and from the lintel to the sill. Frames are aluminum. The entry is accentuated with brick cladding on adjacent walls. The end wall of this wing has a central entry between solid brick walls that wrap around it. Double doors have half-height sidelights and transom windows. The entry is topped with a flat canopy, surmounted by a tall, six-light transom.

The large, multi-light windows continue on the north facades of this wing. An entry is located where the east wing meets the north-south wing that encloses the courtyard on this side of the building. Windows at the lower level are three-part windows. Windows at the upper level alternate with solid panels that complement the colors of the brick. The upper and lower floors here are separated by a continuous flat canopy, and bays are separated by the vertical concrete panels seen throughout the building. Similar patterns continue on the east-west wing in the northeast corner of the complex.

Architectural details. The architectural details that are repeated throughout the building include the vertical concrete panels with incised geometric patterns; the variegated brick veneer in warm tones; window walls with aluminum frames and in certain areas, solid panels in a warm tone; door ensembles with sidelights and tall transoms; and an overall horizontal aspect relieved by the concrete panels that separate the bays.

Interior materials are intact and include brick walls, wood paneling, terrazzo floors, and small, colored tiles in utilitarian areas. Colors throughout the interior and exterior are shades of yellow, orange, terra cotta, warm beige, and natural wood tones, with rust-colored painted accents in certain locations. Clerestories are located in the hallways for borrowed light from the classrooms, another original feature.

The gymnasium

The gymnasium is located on the west side of the complex. It was built as a part of the original complex. It is a twelve-sided, steel-frame building with a flat, reinforced concrete roof with domed skylights. There are no openings on the upper facades (they are noted as insulated steel panels); they extend above the roof in a short parapet. The gym is clad in contemporary corrugated metal. Wrapping around the gymnasium on west, south and east is a one-story structure. The south side functions as a main entry to the gymnasium. It is clad in brick veneer with inset patterns in glass block. The canted entry bay here has four doors between solid panels recessed under a flat canopy. These doors and panels are surmounted by seven transom windows.

Perpendicular to this entrance, on the west face of the main building, is another bank of entry doors. This entry consists of three double doors and a broad wall of windows and solid panels under a flat canopy which is divided into three sections by vertical concrete panels, similar to those found throughout the building.

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The theater

The theater, a New Formalism style building, is located in the southwest corner of the building complex. This theater was added later, in 1965. It is perpendicular to the main entry to the building and required, when built, that the entry be moved slightly to the east. The main seating area of the theater extends north-south. The stage is at the south end, with a one-story projection beyond that. It is clad in aggregate, scored in a large diamond-shaped pattern, and colored brick veneer. The concrete pilasters on the exterior of the theater extend to the decorative, shaped parapet. Single and double flush metal doors occur on the north and south facades of this building. A newer building (post-1965) is located in the northwest corner of the site. It is clad in contemporary corrugated metal and wood with a vertical grain, with small windows along the west façade.

Architectural context

The main building complex for the West High School campus is curtain wall construction, which was a popular post-war construction method that relied on masonry or steel for framing, which allowed exterior cladding to maintain a light, transparent appearance. Curtain wall systems, which could be fabricated on site or prefabricated or preassembled, were typically composed of extruded aluminum mullions in a variety of profiles, with horizontal rails. Large window walls were separated by spandrel panels that covered floors and building infrastructure. Spandrel panel materials varied from glass to ceramic to metal, or were special composite materials. Later developments included the use of precast concrete panels and thin stone veneer for the solid panels.

Curtain wall construction was popular for institutional and commercial buildings. It was particularly popular for office buildings, where its inherent flexibility allowed for re-configuring interior spaces. It was also used for educational buildings as the expanses of glass with operable sash supported educational philosophies of the time about the importance of maintaining natural light and air flow in classrooms and a direct relationship to the outdoors. Curtain wall construction, whether used for selected facades or the whole building, reached its height of popularity in the 1950s. Increasing diversity in building materials and expressions in the 1960s signaled a move away from the light, transparent and often colorful curtain wall buildings of the 1950s.

The design of the theater at West High School is a good, early example of New Formalism (also seen as Neo-Formalism). New Formalism, which was a popular building style in the 1960s and early 1970s, harkened back to classical motifs expressed in modern materials and proportions. New Formalism often exploited the expressive capabilities of new concrete technologies, while maintaining classical elements such as a colonnade and decorative entablature. Many New Formalist buildings maintain a tension between large simple building forms and their contrasting almost delicate, decorative detailing. In some New Formalist buildings, the material itself becomes 'decoration,' as the plastic qualities of concrete were exploited and celebrated. The New Formalist qualities of the theater building at West High School are seen in the plain concrete pilasters and shaped parapet. These simple details contrast with the highly colored brick and aggregate finishes here, emphasizing the contrast between form and details in New Formalist buildings.

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

☒ See Additional Information Page

West High School was designed by associated architects Nordquist & Sundell and Drake & Gustafson. It was constructed in 1958 by Hitz Construction Co. As originally conceived the high school had 40 classrooms. The main building was arranged around a courtyard, as it is today. The one-story building that wraps around the twelve-sided gymnasium faced onto St. Johns Avenue. The main entry was located in a recessed area between the main building and the gymnasium (today the theater is located here).

The 30-acre parcel for the high school was purchased in 1958. Bonds valued at \$1,550,000 were issued for purchasing the land and constructing the buildings. It was planned from the beginning for expansion (*The Billings Gazette*, July 2, 1958). At the time, it was the largest construction project in Billings (*The Billings Gazette*, December 28, 1958). The construction cost for the 139,950 square foot building was \$1,347,860.

The theater addition was designed by Loners & Stroebe, architects, and Hurlburt & Kersich, structural engineers, and constructed in 1965. Additional classrooms were constructed in the northeast corner of the building at this time. Further additions occurred in 1962 and 1966. An auxiliary gym was constructed in 1975. Minor internal remodels have occurred over time as well. Today the campus has 200,000 square feet of building space.

INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

☐ See Additional Information Page

"Architects' Drawing Shows Proposed New Billings High School," *The Billings Gazette*, July 2, 1958, p. 17.

Architectural drawings and rendering. On file, Facilities Department, Yellowstone District #2, 2010.

"Billings Public Schools," http://www.billingsschools.org/?page=contact_co. Accessed April 17, 2010.

Bowker, R. R., *American Architects Directory* (First edition). Bowker LLC/American Institute of Architects, 1956 (Second edition, 1962; Third edition, 1970).

"Building Data, Original Pictures and Projects," Facilities Department, Yellowstone District #2, 2010.

"Docomomowewa," http://www.docomomo-wewa.org/styles_gallery.php, accessed April 20, 2010.

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<http://arc.lib.montana.edu/architect/index.php> accessed March 2010.

"New High School Tops Construction Projects in City," *The Billings Gazette*, December 28, 1958, p. 1.

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Property Name: **West High School**

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

West High School is one of three high schools in the city of Billings. The city additionally provides 22 elementary schools and four middle schools for their enrolled population of approximately 15,500 students ("*Billings Public Schools*"). West High School represents one of the many schools built in the post-war era to serve Billings' growing population.

The Architects

West High School was designed in 1958 or earlier by the Billings firm of Nordquist & Sundell, in association with the Billings firm of Drake & Gustafson. Raymond Edward Nordquist was born in Detroit, Michigan on February 22, 1926. He attended Montana State College from 1946 to 1950, from which he was awarded a BS in Architecture. He worked for Edwin Osness in 1958 and for Cushing & Terrell from 1950 to 1953, before forming his own firm of Raymond E. Nordquist in 1953; he was joined shortly thereafter by Leonard Sundell. They practiced together as Nordquist & Sundell until 1959. Among the Montana State University - Billings buildings Nordquist is known for are the Student Union Building and the Eastern Montana College of Engineering. He also designed the YWCA Building in Billings and the Montana State Oil Building in Bozeman.

The second partner in Nordquist & Sundell, Leonard Raymond Sundell, was born in Miles City, Montana on July 19, 1922. He attended the Montana State School of Mines, graduating in 1945, and Montana State College, graduating in 1949 with a BS in Architecture. He worked for Billings architect Chandler C. Cohagen from 1948 until 1953, at which time he joined Raymond Nordquist. Among the institutional buildings that Sundell designed when he was with Nordquist were Apsaruke Hall (1953), the MSUB Student Union Building (1955), and the Billings YWCA (1955). He formed his own firm of Leonard R. Sundell in 1959 (*Bowker, 1962*).

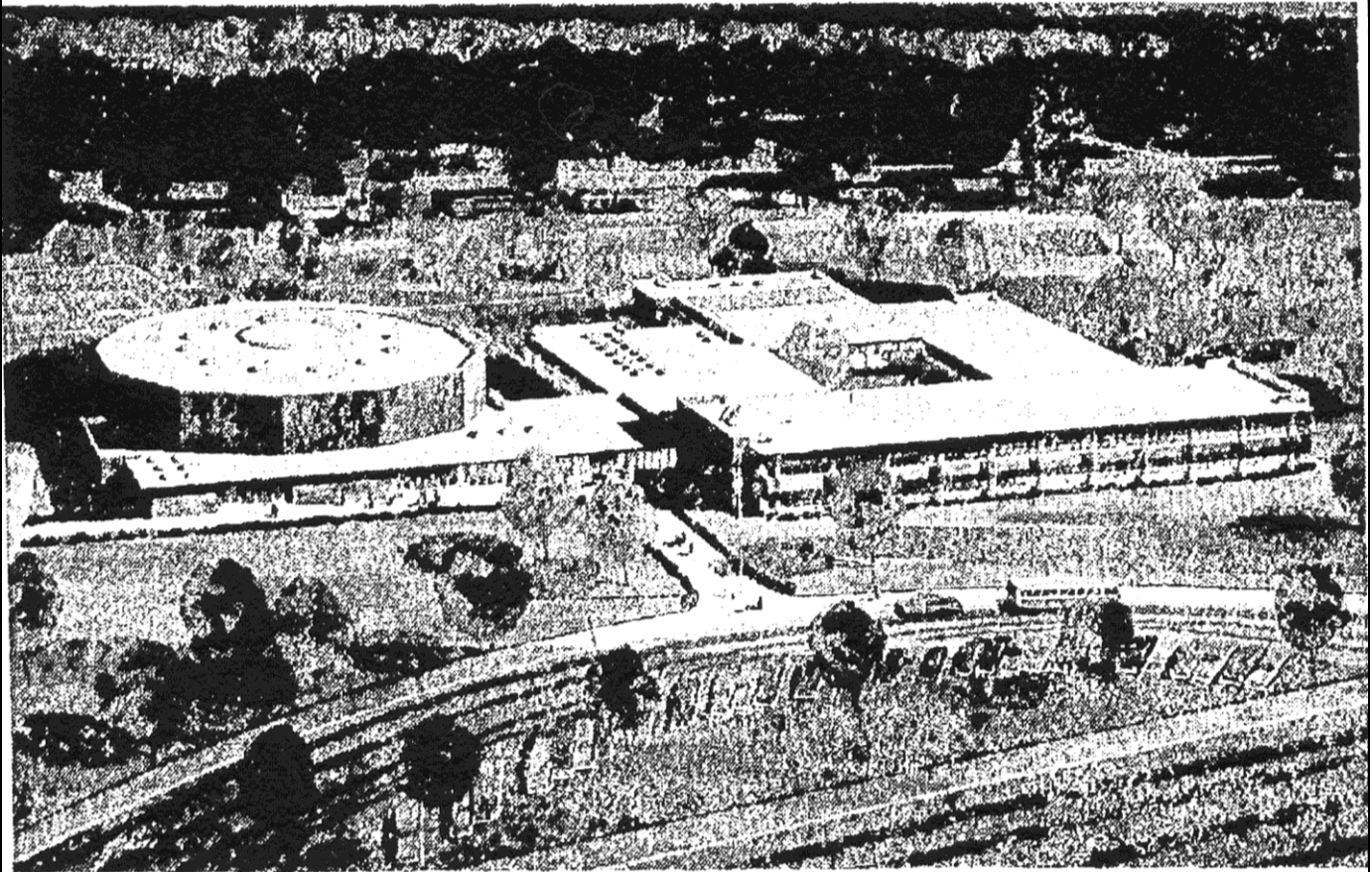
The following is a profile of the partners in Drake & Gustafson. Vernon Leslie Drake was born in Billings, Montana in 1922. He was educated at the Northwest Nazarene College, Billings Polytechnic Institute, Texas A & M, and Montana State College, where he received a BA in Architecture in 1948, graduating with honors. He worked for Billings architect Chandler C. Cohagen as a draftsman from 1946 to 1949, after which he was in private practice. He was a partner in the firm Osness & Drake Architects from 1952 to 1954. After this association he formed his own firm, where he designed a number of mostly institutional structures. He became a partner in Drake & Gustafson, Architects in 1956.

F. (Francis) Wayne Gustafson was born in Chinook, Montana in 1927. He attended Montana State College in Bozeman, where he received a BS in Architecture in 1950. At that time he worked as a draftsman for Chandler C. Cohagen. Later he worked for the prominent Billings firm of Cushing & Terrell. In 1956 he became associated with Vernon Drake, with whom he formed the firm Drake & Gustafson. They designed Glendive Community Hospital in 1967; the Western Montana College Faculty Office & Classroom Building in Dillon in 1968; and the mechanical system of the Brick Breeden Fieldhouse at Montana State University-Bozeman (no date), among other projects. They were still in association in 1970.

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Architects' Drawing Shows Proposed New Billings High School

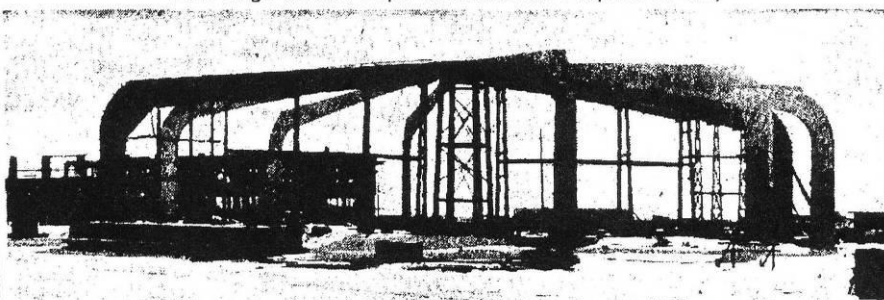


Architect's drawing of a new district No. 2 senior high school, to be built at 24th St. and St. John's Ave., shows the octagonal gymnasium-auditorium, left, and classroom sections of the building. Nordquist & Sundell and Drake & Gustafson, associated architects, designers of the building, report the structure will have a floor

and a roof system of re-enforced concrete. Exposed brick and treated concrete exterior, and exposed brick, natural wood, plaster and acoustic tile interior are planned. Contractors' bids on the building, which will house 40 teaching spaces, will be received in the office of the clerk of school district No. 2 until 8 p.m. July 29.

Source: *The Billings Gazette*, July 2, 1958

New High School Tops Construction Projects in City



Largest single construction job started in Billings during 1958 is the new Billings West High School at 24th St. W. and St. John's Ave. In foreground is the framework for the 12-sided gymnasium, which also will be used as an assembly room, while in background is two-story section of the main high school building, which also will

have administration offices on the ground floor. Total construction cost of the high school is approximately \$1,350,000. General contractor is Hitz Construction Co. and the building was designed by Nordquist and Sundell and Drake and Gustafson, associated architects.—Carp's photo.

Source: *The Billings Gazette*, July 2, 1958

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Property Name: **West High School**

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NRHP Listing Date:

NRHP Eligibility: ☒ Yes ☐ No ☒ Individually ☐ Contributing to Historic District ☐ Noncontributing to Historic District

NRHP Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Area of Significance: **Education** Period of Significance: **1958-1965**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

☐ See Additional Information Page

West High School is significant under Criterion C, as a good example of a post-war educational facility that embodies the principles of post-war school design and as a good example of a campus-style, suburban school that nonetheless represents the most current thinking in architectural styles, materials, and construction methods. Post-war schools were designed to be responsive to the natural environment, which was considered a more supportive learning environment, particularly for young children. Expansive window walls, which created well-lit and ventilated spaces, were incorporated, as was visual and physical access to the outdoors. West High School, with its interior courtyard and siting within a large open campus, exemplifies these ideas.

West High School also represents the latest architectural concepts in the design of the various additions to the school, which are nonetheless compatible in design. The architects clearly experimented with materials, colors, prefabricated components and various types of detailing in designing the building. Major components of the building complex reflect current design thinking, yet are skillfully related to each other to create an overall cohesive expression. The building represents a record of current architectural and educational design of the time that nonetheless continues to serve its original purpose and the community.

INTEGRITY

☐ See Additional Information Page

All additions to the building occurred within the Period of Significance for the building, which is defined as 1958 to 1965. Research on the building revealed that it was designed in such a way as to preserve the ability to expand the building in the future. Additions, with the exception of the theater, were constructed in the same materials and the same or compatible architectural details as the original building. The theater employed contrasting yet compatible features and detailing, and today acts as a major focal point on the campus, contrasting with the original building. For these reasons, additions that occurred up through 1965 do not undermine from the integrity of the building.

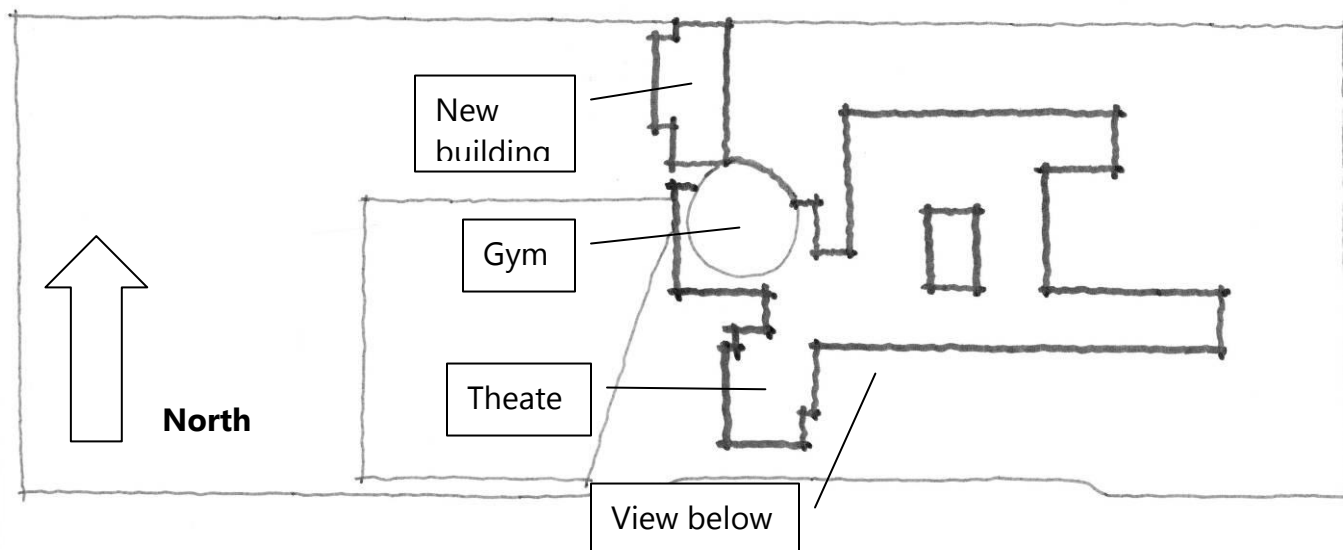
The building retains integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, and association. The design of the building has been altered over time, but not to the degree that it would undermine the significance of the complex, as noted above. Feeling has been affected by the introduction of subsequent architectural styles, but all styles introduced are found within the Period of Significance and compatible with the earlier buildings, as noted above.

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South façade, looking east

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **West High School**

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Description: **Gym, south facade**



Description: **Gym, interior view**

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Property Name: **West High School**

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Description: **Gym, main entry, south facade**



Description: **East entry, perpendicular to gym**

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **West High School**

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Description: **Perpendicular panels that separate bays**



Description: **Main entry and east façade of theater**

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **West High School**

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Description: **Theater, east and south facades**



Description: **Division between west and east wings, southwest facade**

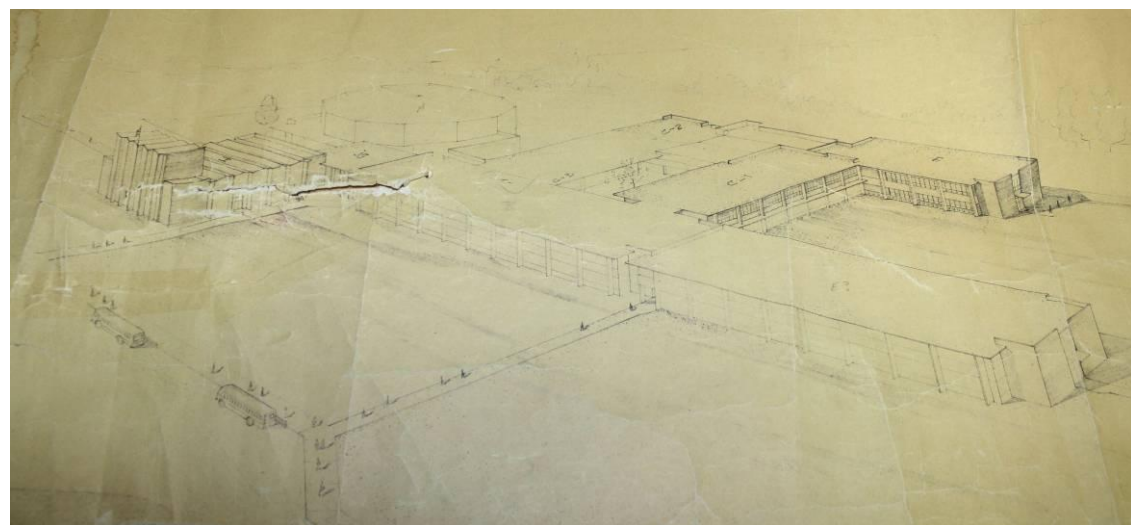
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Property Name: **West High School**

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Description: **Typical end wall entry**



Description: **Perspective sketch of new additions, 1966**

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Property Name: **West High School**

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Description: **East and south façade, south side, viewed from southeast**

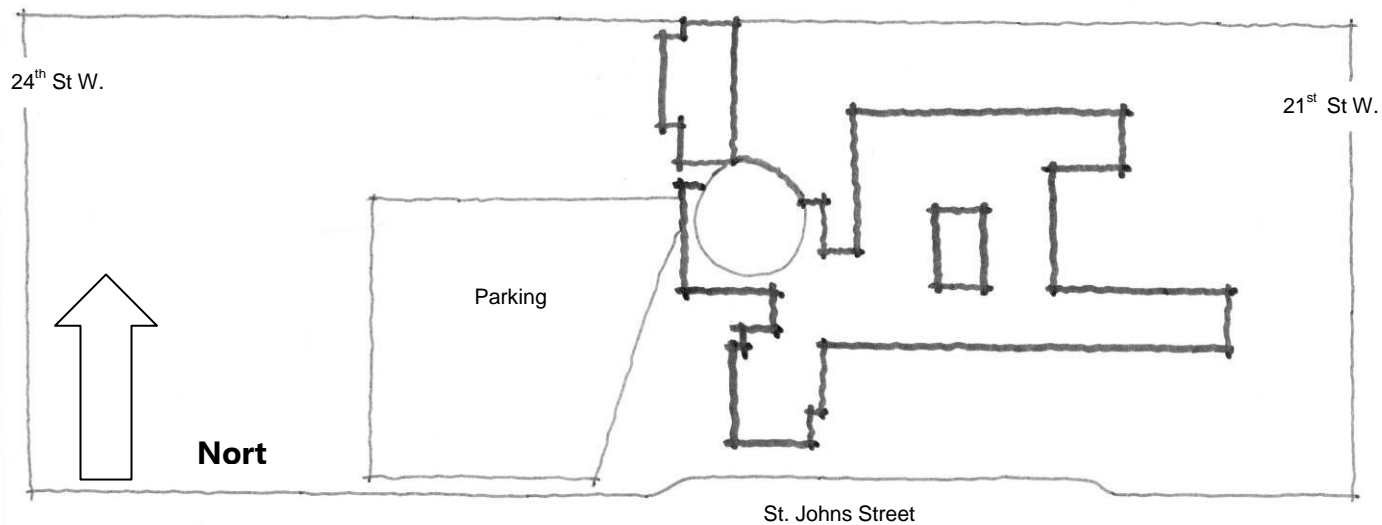


Description: **North and east facades, east side, viewed from northeast**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
SITE MAP

Property Name: **West High School**

Site Number: **24 YL 1865**



Newer building in northwest corner of site

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Property Name: **West High School**

Site Number: **24 YL 1865**

